

The ruins of early pioneer furnaces and beehive coke ovens in the juniper hills west of Cedar City testify that the making of iron and steel in Utah goes back more than a century.

These tumbled down remains also speak for the courage of early pioneers and remind that the goal of economic independence has never been easy in Utah.

At the same time, more historic was the event that would make Utah Valley, not Iron County as first envisioned, a major center for the production of iron and steel.

The year 1973 marks the 50th anniversary of that occasion.

#### 1923 Groundbreaking

It all happened in the summer of 1923, when hundreds of citizens from Utah County towns gathered on the foothills between Provo and Springville for groundbreaking ceremonies for an important new industry.

The new plant was named Ironton after the original pioneer location started in 1852 in Southwestern Utah. Construction began that day on one battery of 33 by-product coke ovens, a single 450-ton blast furnace and related facilities.

A sparkling stream of molten iron from the new furnace the following year introduced the beginning of the state's first successful ironmaking venture. An old iron bell, cast in 1855 by pioneer ironmakers at Cedar City, rang the good news out across Utah Valley on July 7, 1924.

Recently dismantled, the Ironton Plant since then has gone the way of the pioneer works after which it was named. But this proud operation lives on in the memories of the old-timers in Utah Valley who paved the way for today's steel industry by

making their plant a success from 1924 to 1962.

#### Herald Story

Meanwhile, if hundreds gathered to break ground of Ironton, few in Utah Valley were prepared for what happened after the Provo Daily Herald on Feb. 8, 1942, broke the news of plans to build a giant steelmaking complex on the shore of Utah Lake. The new mill was to take its name from a small resort area — Geneva.

At peak of construction, more than 10,000 workmen for some 110 contractors literally swamped local housing facilities, restaurants, transportation and schools.

From the rental of a dragline for groundbreaking in March that year to completion in June, 1944, a total of \$96 million was spent on the project. Construction workers during that period took home average weekly earnings of \$71.60 — big money in those days.

An estimated 20,000 carloads of materials, not counting truck deliveries, went into the project. More than 10 million yards of dirt were dug and some 675,000 yards of concrete poured.

The coming of Geneva was a big thing, too, for Utah Valley towns and communities.

#### Economic Shift

To signal the economic shift from agriculture to industry, American Fork changed its annual celebrated from Poultry Days to Steel Days. And for a time, Orem fathers pondered changing the name of their town to Geneva.

Geneva Works was built by the Defense Plant Corporation of the U.S. Government, shortly after the outbreak of World War II, for an important wartime purpose. This was to supply plate and structural steel to shipbuilders

on the West Coast from a place closer than Chicago, but enough inland for safety against a possible enemy attack.

Original facilities included by-product coke ovens, three 1,100-ton blast furnaces, 12 225-ton open hearth furnace slab and bloom mill, plate structural mills, plus a new mine at Horse Canyon in Carbon County, limestone and dolomite quarry near Payson, enlarged iron ore mines, and Cedar City.

As the operations took shape, a new subsidiary of U.S. Steel, Geneva Steel Company, organized to start up the plant stages and operate it on a non-profit basis during the war for the Defense Plant Corporation.

#### Mathesius Named

A leading international steelmaking authority, Walther Mathesius, then president of operations for Steel, was named president of the new company on August 1943.

Major steps in the construction and start up of Geneva Works were:

Completion of Central Maintenance Shops — July 1943.

First coke oven pushed — December 7, 1943.

First blast furnace blown — January 3, 1944.

First open hearth furnace charged — February 3, 1944.

Slab and bloom mill started — February 24, 1944.

Plate mill start up — March 1944.

Delayed start up of structural mill — July 8, 1944.

#### Odd Foundling

From the beginning, Geneva Works was an odd foundling, the industrial scene — conceived in the shotgun haste of war and brought forth in a past too far by rail from the markets it served on the West Coast.

Starting in 1944, fledgling Utah steelmakers threw their weight into the war effort to the tune of 632,317 tons of plates and 69,900 net tons of structurals, shipped West Coast shipbuilders, but never got up a good head of steam before the war ended.

With cessation of hostilities, operations by October, 1945, ground to a standstill with only a skeleton crew of some 40 standing by at the silent mill.

The big question in everyone's mind at that time: What will become of "Utah's Big Baby," as Geneva was called by the Saturday Evening Post. The moniker stuck.

Many from every walk of life now pitched in to help find a private foster parent for the plant. But three men deserve most of the real credit for the final decision by U.S. Steel in 1946 to purchase Geneva and convert steelmaking facilities to peacetime markets.

#### Important Tries

There were:  
A country boy from Missouri, named Harry S. Truman, who



TWO FIGURES prominent in the early years of Geneva Works in Utah County were Dr. Walther Mathesius, left, president of Geneva Steel Company, and Benjamin F. Fairless, president of U.S. Steel Corp. Photo was taken at the Utah County plant.



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UTAH COUNTY COMMISSION

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